DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 649 CS 500 899

AUTHOR Lockwood, Diane Lee
TITLE Sex and Persuasibility: A New Approach.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Central States Speech Association (Milwaukee, April, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Changing Attitudes; College Students; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Persuasive Discourse; *Psychological Studies; *Self Concept; Sex Differences; *Sex Discrimination

ABSTRACT

Given that subjects are exposed to a non-sex-biased and counter-attitudinal message from a highly credible source, this study hypothesized that lowly ego-involved subjects would experience significantly greater attitude change than highly ego-involved subjects, regardless of their sex. The variable of ego-involvement was controlled by equalizing the value of this variable across three groups. "Sex-biasness" of an issue was controlled through a series of pilot studies by the selection of an issue which was near equally ego-involving for both sexes. Additional pilot studies disclosed that the message was discrepant to the majority of subjects' beliefs and that both sources were consistently evaluated as highly credible. Pretest subjects included 876 students from introductory speech courses who completed semantic differential attitude scales to determine their initial attitude and level of ego-involvement. Only 186 of these subjects met the criteria to continue and take the posttest. Results indicated that highly ego-involved receivers were less susceptible to persuasion than lowly ego-involved receivers, regardless of their sex. However, there was no significant differences in the amount of attitude change between highly and lowly ego-involved subjects on latitudes of rejection and noncommitment. (HOD)

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 098649

SEX AND PERSUASIBILITY: A NEW APPROACH

by

Diane Lee Lockwood

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Diane Lee Lockwood
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

Central States Speech Association

Competitive Papers Section

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

April 4-6, 1974

CS 500 899

This author's original research interest was to examine the notion of the generalizibility of sex and persuasibility research. Wenburg and Wilmot make the following statement in The Personal Communication Process: "In general, it appears that women are more easily persuaded than men."[1] The theoretic rationale underlying this and similar statements on sex and persuasibility have rested primarily on socio-cultural foundations. The most frequent rationale underlying this and similar statements on sex and persuasibility have rested primarily on socio-cultural foundations. The most frequent rationale in previous sex and persuasibility research has been that our society expects and teaches females to be submissive while males are expected to be self-assertive, thus females are more persuasible than males."[2] Given our modern societal attitudes toward women's liberation, however, Wenburg and Wilmot have qualified their statement on the persuasibility of women to the extent that they recognize the possibility that as the women's movement progresses, the currently reported differential effects of sex on persuasibility may no long be (a) accurate or (b) attributable to socio-cultural differences.[3]

This author was surprised when she went to the research on sex and persuasibility and found that the results were actually more conflicting than she had been led to believe. Previous research, in fact, does not

This research is part of the author's M.A. thesis which was done under the supervision of Dr. John Wenburg. Dr. Vincent Di Salvo and Dr. John Boyd were committee members.

[1]John R. Wenburg and William W. Wilmot, The Personal Communication Process (New York: John Wiley, 1973), p. 173.

[2]For example, see Carl I. Hovland and Irving L. Janis, "General Persuasibility," in Speech Communication, ed., Howard H. Martin and Kenneth E. Andersen, (Boston: Allyn Bacon, 1968), p. 253.

[3]Wenburg and Wilmot, p. 173.

lead one to conclude that women are more persuasible than men, but rather our field has generalized limited results to conclude the general persuasibility factor of women. For example, Bostrom and Kemp cited ten studies which reported that women changed their attitudes more than men in response to a persuasive communication.[4] In contrast, they also cited nine studies which reported no significant differences between the sexes in their susceptibility to persuasion.[5] Consequently, Bostrom and Kemp's study led this author to re-examine the theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches of previous sex and persuasibility research in an attempt to isolate some of the variables which may have confounded previous research.

Previous sex and persuasibility research has not taken into account the notion of ego-involvement. Basically, if a person feels that their attitude toward an issue is important to them, the individual is said to be highly ego-involved with the issue.[6] Ego-involvement theory further assumes that if one knows an individual's level of ego-involvement with a particular issue, then one will be able to predict how that person will

4 Robert Bostrom and Alan P. Kemp, "Type of Speech, Sex of Speaker, and Sex of Subject as Factors Influencing Persuasion," Central States Speech Journal, 20 (1969), 245-51.

5 Ibid, 245-51.

6 For a full discussion of ego-involvement theory, see Muzafer Sherif and Carl I. Hovland, Social Judgement (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); Carolyn W. Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Roger E. Nebergall, Attitude and Attitude Change (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1965); and Carolyn W. Sherif and Muzafer Sherif, Attitude, Ego-Involvement, and Change (New York: John Wiley, 1967).

respond to a counter-attitudinal message on that issue.[7] In short, ego-involvement theory predicts that lowly ego-involved individuals will change their attitudes more than highly ego-involved individuals when presented with a persuasive counter-attitudinal message. This author is well aware of the recently published studies by Wilmot which have raised some serious questions about the construct validity of ego-involvement measures, but she still feels that the theory itself is intuitively attractive and is capable of predicting attitude change.[8] Since ego-involvement may be a predictor of attitude change, its relevancy to sex and attitude change research is apparent. If previous sex and persuasibility research had been approached from an ego-involvement perspective, rather than a cultural perspective, it would have allowed us to examine a variable which previously has not been considered. Specifically, receivers' level of ego-involvement with the topic may have been a relevant confounding variable in previous sex and persuasibility research. That is, the receivers' involvement with the topic (by sex) was not examined by pilot or pretest measurements in previous research. Since Sherif and Sherif found that lowly ego-involved subjects experienced greater attitude change than highly ego-involved subjects, it then follows that if an issue is, for example, more ego-involving for males than females (e.g., "College Draft Deferments"), then females would

[7]Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall, pp. 60-126. These authors contend that an individual's degree of ego-involvement can be determined by defining that person's attitude which is composed of three theoretical regions: latitude of acceptance, latitude of rejection, and latitude of noncommitment.

[8]William W. Wilmot, "Ego-Involvement: A Confusing Variable in Speech Communication Research," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 47 (1971), 429-36; and "A Test of the Construct and Predictive Validity of Three Measures of Ego-Involvement," Speech Monographs, 28 (1971), 216-27.

experience greater attitude change as a natural consequence of their low ego-involvement. In short, the possibility exists that the sex differences found in attitude change research were a function of differential involvement with the topic rather than a cultural predisposition on the part of females toward persuasibility. "Sex-biasness" of an issue was defined in this paper as being an issue's inherent capacity to differentially ego-involve male or female receivers.

As a result of the relationship between ego-involvement theory and sex and persuasibility research, the following hypothesis was generated:

> Given that subjects are exposed to a non-sex biased belief-discrepant message from a highly credible source, then lowly ego-involved subjects will experience significantly greater attitude change than highly ego-involved subjects, regardless of their sex.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In light of the author's criticism leveled against previous sex and persuasibility literature, the following variables had to be controlled: level of receivers' ego-involvement with the issue, sex of speaker, potential sex-biasness of the issue, message discrepancy, and source credibility. The possible confounding variable of ego-involvement was controlled by equalizing the value of this variable across three groups: (1) male and female subjects who heard a six minute taped counter-attitudinal message delivered by a male speaker, (2) male and female subjects who heard an identical counter-attitudinal message delivered by a female speaker, and (3) a control group composed of male and female subjects who did not hear the message.

Sex-biasness of an issue was controlled through a series of pilot studies by the selection of an issue ("Campus Co-ed Dorm Visitation Rights") which was near equally ego-involving for both sexes. Because of the

limited space in this paper, the author cannot elaborate on the details of the pilot studies, but for now let it be sufficient to state that it is extremely difficult for one to obtain a completely non-sexbiased issue in the same sense that it is virtually impossible to obtain a completely "neutral" topic. At best, it seems that one can obtain a "near" nonsex-biased topic. Additional pilot studies disclosed that the message was discrepant to the majority of subjects' beliefs, and that both sources were consistently evaluated as highly credible.

Eight hundred and seventy-six students from introductory speech courses at the University of Nebraska completed the pretest which was designed to determine their initial attitude and level of ego-involvement with the issue. The pretest consisted of Diab semantic differential-type attitude scales (approve-disapprove; just-unjust; warranted-unwarranted; fair-unfair) and behavioroid and information-seeking measures.[9] All semantic differential-type scales had been factor analyzed by SPSS (PA1) programs.[10] Attitude

[9]Behavioroid and information-seeking indices were included to test the reliability of Diab-type ego-involvement measures. A "known-groups" exploratory study which used subjects from a Jewish fraternity on the "Middle East Crisis" issue was conducted by this author to evaluate various measures of ego-involvement. Responses suggested that if subjects were highly ego-involved with an issue, then they were more willing to testify their stand on the issue and actively seek information about the issue than lowly ego-involved subjects. Further studies are being conducted to assess the reliability and construct validity of these new measures. According to dissonance theory, one way that a person may reduce dissonance is to add new cognitive elements to one attitude cluster or the other or both. This would, presumably, involve seeking out other information which supports that person's chosen attitude and negates their unchosen alternatives. Hence, from a dissonance theory perspective, one might predict that highly ego-involved subjects would actively seek information about the issue more than lowly-involved subjects. The conceptual linkage, however, between dissonance and ego-involvement theory needs further explication. For a brief discussion of dissonance reduction theory, see Charles A. Kiesler, Barry E. Collins, and Norman Miller, Attitude Change (New York: John Wiley, 1969), 197-200.

[10]Norman H. Nie, Dale H. Bent, and C. Hadlai Hull, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 208-238. This program has been used by Raymond Tucker in his previous research on factor analysis. See Raymond Tucker, "Reliability of Semantic Differential Scales: The Role of Factor Analysis," Western Speech, 35 (1971), 185-90.

was defined in terms of most acceptable, latitude of acceptance, latitude of rejection, and latitude of noncommitment summed scores. Based on previous procedures employed by Mortensen and Sereno, subjects were then operationally defined as highly or lowly ego-involved on the basis of these latitude scores.[11] Only 186 of the 826 subjects pretested met the rather rigid operational criteria for high or low ego-involvement with the issue. These subjects were retained for use in the posttest (see Table 1 for posttest n's). A control group composed of highly and lowly ego-involved male and female receivers was used to assess treatment effects.

Table 1. Number of Subjects in Posttest Cells

Groups	n
Group 1. Taped Male Speaker	
Highly ego-involved male receivers	19
Lowly ego-involved male receivers	22
Highly ego-involved female receivers	18
Lowly ego-involved female receivers	20
Group 2. Taped Female Speaker	
Highly ego-involved male receivers	20
Lowly ego-involved male receivers	17
Highly ego-involved female receivers	17
Lowly ego-involved female receivers	19
Group 3. Control Group	
Highly ego-involved male receivers	3
Lowly ego-involved male receivers	4
Highly ego-involved female receivers	3
Lowly ego-involved female receivers	4
	Total N = 166

[11] C. David Mortensen and Kenneth K. Sereno, "The Influence of Ego-Involvement and Discrepancy on Perceptions of Communication," Speech Monographs, 38 (1970), 127-34.

Administration of the persuasive message and immediate posttest was conducted two weeks after exposure to the attitude pretest in order to avoid effects of pretest sensitization. All subjects in the posttest session again completed scales that were identical to those used in the pretest. Additional "filler" scales were included in the posttest to mask recognition of pretest scales. Order and polarity of scales were also randomized to avoid possible recall of pretest responses.

Attitude change was then defined as difference scores obtained by subtracting posttest from pretest scores on all regions (i.e., most acceptable difference scores, latitude of acceptance difference scores, latitude of rejection difference scores, and latitude of noncommitment difference scores). These difference scores became the dependent variable measures and the independent variable measures were sex of receiver and level of ego-involvement.

RESULTS

Main and interaction effects of receivers' sex and level of ego-involvement were analyzed by a FINN multivariate analysis program (see Table 2).[12] As predicted, there was no significant interaction effect between sex of receiver and level of ego-involvement. In addition, there were no significant differences in the main effects of attitude change between male and female receivers on any attitude change region. As predicted, there were significant differences in the main effects of attitude change for level of ego-involvement on "most acceptable" ($F=6.823$, $p<.05$) and latitude of acceptance ($F=5.012$, $p<.05$) attitude

[12] Jeremy D. Finn, Multivariance (Ann Arbor: National Educational Resources, Inc., 1972), version 5.

regions. There were, however, no significant main effects of attitude change for level of ego-involvement on latitude of rejection or noncommitment attitude regions.

Table 2

FINN Multivariate Analysis of Sex of Receiver and Level of Ego-Involvement Effects

Dependent Variables	Mean Square	Step Down F	P less than	
Interaction of Sex of Receiver (A) and Ego-Involvement (B)				
1. Most Acceptable position	28.198	0.876	0.355	NSD
2. Latitude of Acceptance	14.241	2.421	0.131	NSD
3. Latitude of Rejection	0.818	0.302	0.586	NSD
4. Latitude of Noncommitment	5.782	0.828	0.369	NSD
Main Effects of Sex of Receiver (A)				
1. Most Acceptable position	2.225	0.069	0.794	NSD
2. Latitude of Acceptance	2.687	0.522	0.474	NSD
3. Latitude of Rejection	0.565	0.120	0.731	NSD
4. Latitude of Noncommitment	0.001	0.007	0.934	NSD
Main Effects of Level of Ego-Involvement (B)				
1. Most Acceptable position	219.872	6.823	0.0[illegible]3	SD*
2. Latitude of Acceptance	12.249	5.012	0.03[illegible]	SD*
3. Latitude of Rejection	0.031	0.026	0.874	NSD
4. Latitude of Noncommitment	0.048	0.070	0.793	NSD

*Alpha level was pre-established at $p < .05$

A t-test of differences in the mean posttest "most acceptable" attitude scores of highly and lowly ego-involved subjects revealed a significant difference ($t=2.28$, $df=150$, $p<.05$) such that lowly involved subjects experienced greater "most acceptable" attitude change than highly ego-involved subjects when presented with a belief-discrepant message.[13] In addition,

[13] A preliminary t-test of differences in the mean pretest "most acceptable" attitude scores of highly and lowly ego-involved subjects revealed no significant difference ($t=1.03$, $df=184$). Thus, subjects who differed on level of ego-involvement in the pretest were regarded as comparable on extremity of attitude position.

a *t*-test in the mean posttest latitude of acceptance attitude scores of highly and lowly involved subjects revealed a significant difference ($t=2.17$, $df=150$, $p<.05$) such that lowly involved subjects experienced greater latitude of acceptance attitude change than highly ego-involved subjects. There were, however, no significant main effects of attitude change for level of ego-involvement on latitudes of rejection or noncommitment.

Analysis of variance was the statistical procedure used to compare data from experimental groups with the control groups. Results indicated that there was a significant pretest to posttest attitude shift among subjects who heard the persuasive message as opposed to those who did not ($F=.348$, $df=2$ and 163, $p<.05$).

DISCUSSION

Since sex of speaker, sex-biasness of issue, and sex of receiver were controlled in this experiment, any differential effects on attitude change which emerged were attributed to level of ego-involvement rather than sex. Specifically, highly ego-involved receivers were less susceptible to persuasion than lowly ego-involved receivers, regardless of their sex. This is not to say that women, as a group, may or may not be more persuasible on certain issues and men on others, but rather this would be dependent upon their ego-involvement with the issues. Therefore, a viable predictor of persuasibility on a variety of issues across sex would seem to be the subject's ego-involvement.

The study's major weakness, however, appears to be the operationalization of the ego-involvement variable since there were no significant differences in the amount of attitude change between highly and lowly

ego-involved subjects on latitudes of rejection and noncommitment. That is, there was not "total" attitude change in all theoretical regions. The operationalization of level of ego-involvement depends, in large part, on the individual's latitude of rejection. Hence, one would have expected a significant latitude of rejection difference between highly and lowly ego-involved subjects on the posttest. Because there was no significant difference in latitude of rejection between highly and lowly ego-involved subjects, one might suspect a problem with the operationalization of ego-involvement. Wilmot's research, as previously indicated, has raised some serious questions about the construct validity of ego-involvement measures. This researcher had attempted to minimize the problems with ego-involvement measures by (a) including additional behavioroid and information-seeking measures of ego-involvement as reliability checks, and (b) attempting to internalize high ego-involvement in those subjects who were operationally defined as being highly ego-involved (via having them write down their stand on the issue before they heard the persuasive message in the posttest session). These minimal attempts, however, do not alleviate the basic construct validity problems with ego-involvement. Further studies which use "known groups" procedures are currently being conducted by this author to specify the component elements of ego-involvement and assess the construct validity of new ego-involvement measures.

After all necessary modifications on ego-involvement measures are clarified in future research, then this study should be replicated using different subjects and issues. If results of future sex and persuasibility research do not demonstrate any differential effects of sex on attitude change, then attitude change should be directed toward the consideration

of more pertinent audience variables (e.g., ego-involvement, dogmatism, self-esteem, prior knowledge, group affiliation, norm expectations, and other personality and social variables which may predict attitude change) other than sex.